

## Men and Depression

Dear Dr. Weiss-Wisdom,

My thirty-two year old stepson has hit some hard times and has had to move in with us. He lost his job, lost his condo in foreclosure, and his girlfriend broke up with him. I'm very worried about him, but my husband thinks he has to just tough it out. My stepson stays in his room most of the time (he says he's applying to jobs with his laptop) and doesn't want to talk. He hasn't been seeing his friends and he's not interested in doing much of anything. My stepson and I have never been very close, and I don't know if there is anything that I can do to help him other than giving him a break by letting him stay at our place. Do you have any suggestions?

- Worried stepmom

Dear Worried SM,

It sounds to me like you and your husband have reason to be concerned. Depression is often overlooked and misunderstood in men because the symptoms can look different than they do in women. Generally, women are verbally expressive about how they feel. Men suffering with depression are more likely to withdraw socially, complain of fatigue, irritability, loss of interest in work or hobbies, and sleep disturbances.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, researchers estimate that at least six million men in the United States suffer from a depressive disorder every year. Depression can become a serious illness if it's not treated properly. Sometimes, undue stress can bring on depression. Your stepson has had severe setbacks in several major areas of his life, all at the same time. While under these circumstances, it is normal for your stepson to be feeling down, it's important to take the warning signs of depression seriously. More men commit suicide than women, often it is done suddenly without warning.

Ideally, your husband can talk to your stepson about seeing a doctor for a diagnostic evaluation and treatment. If your husband doesn't think it's necessary, you can try talking with your stepson directly about your concern - let him know that most people would feel depressed with what he is going through. Letting him know that depression is common among men and is nothing to be ashamed about, may be helpful. Sometimes people have to make an appointment for the depressed person and help them get started in appropriate treatment. His symptoms should begin to lift within several weeks of treatment or the treatment approach should be re-evaluated.

When people are depressed, it can help to have a good listener who doesn't judge their feelings; they require extra understanding, patience, affection, and encouragement to get better. Even though you and your stepson are not close, it wouldn't hurt to invite him to take walks, see movies, and engage with you. You can gently insist, but avoid making him feel guilty if he declines. This crisis in your stepson's life may bring you closer and help you to deepen your relationship. Most people really appreciate the people that are there for them when the chips are down.

After reading this, if you think that your stepson is seriously depressed, insist that he get treatment. Of course, you'll need to have your husband on board. Below are some reading suggestions that might be helpful for your stepson as well as for you and your husband. Depression is a serious illness, but with the right treatment, most people eventually get better.

"I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression " by Terrance Real

"Is He Depressed or What? What to Do When the Man You Love is Irritable, Moody, and Withdrawn." By David Wexler, Ph.D.

### About the Author

Dr. Diana Weiss-Wisdom is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist in private practice with adults, adolescents, older children, couples, families, and groups.

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